DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 897 JC 990 612

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TITLE	Focus Session Keynote Presentation on Student Development.
PUB DATE	1999-04-00
NOTE	8p.; Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Community Colleges (Nashville, TN, April 7-10, 1999). Tennessee.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	College School Cooperation; *College Students; *Community Colleges; *Educational Change; *Educational Planning; Enrollment; *Enrollment Projections; *Futures (of Society); Higher Education; Student Development
IDENTIFIERS	*Maryland

ABSTRACT

This address focuses upon the expected increases in enrollments of traditional college students in the first decade of the 21st Century, and the impact of this increase on community colleges is discussed. Much recent activity and research at community colleges have focused on adult education, workforce development, technological advancement and distance learning. Colleges need to also devote resources to meeting the needs of traditional college students. By 2007-8, it is predicted that there will be a 23 percent increase in high school graduates. This could lead to an additional 2 million traditional-age students in higher education. In order to provide service to this population, community colleges should: (1) plan for expanded uses of classrooms, parking services and other campus facilities; (2) address future faculty and staffing needs to instruct these students and consider impacts of faculty retirement and public school staffing requirements; (3) evaluate the student support needs of traditional students; (4) be prepared for a highly diverse student population; and (5) create real, substantial, dynamic partnerships with our school systems. Specific planning recommendations include reviewing state higher education capacities; evaluating schools and community colleges and interrelated systems; analyzing faculty hiring needs; comprehensively reviewing student support services; and carefully planning facilities. The document includes qualitative findings from focus groups with students enrolled in remedial education classes in Maryland colleges. (RDG)

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1999 AACC Annual Convention Focus Session keynote Presentation on Student Development

By Dr. Charlene R. Nunley

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1999 AACC Annual Convention

Focus Session Keynote Presentation on Student Development

Dr. Charlene R. Nunley
President – Montgomery College

April 7-10, 1999

Are we ready?

In my institution, in the State of Maryland, and probably at many Colleges across the country, we have not been giving enough planned attention to the traditional student and to a dramatic trend that is about to descend upon us.

For example, at Maryland Community College President's Meetings our agendas have focused substantially on workforce development, distance learning, virtual community colleges, the University of Phoenix, and wiring our campuses and facing the cost implications of technology. I can't remember the last time we talked about the traditional college student and the dramatic onslaught of these students that is about to need our services. Recently, we have begun some careful thought about this population in my institution where we know that we will experience 40 percent growth in high school graduating classes during the first decade of the 21st century. That's probably why Cliff Adelman's article, "Crosscurrents and Riptides—Asking About the Capacity of the Higher Education System" in *Change Magazine*'s January/February issue, had such an impact on me.

Given no change in the college going rates (which Mr. Adelman argues rather persuasively could increase) there will be a national increase of 450,000 high school graduates by 2007-8, a 23 percent increase. If the college going rate rises by 5 percent, we will see 600,000 more students, a 31 percent increase. If this 600,000 annual rate of increase is retained at typical patterns to the bachelor's degree, there will be 2 million more traditional age students in the higher education system than we have at the present time. Mr. Adelman raises the question of whether there is enough capacity in higher education to accommodate these students.

In my State of Maryland, the University system is already realizing that it does not have adequate residence hall capacity to accommodate the State's growth in

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enrollment if Maryland high school grads enroll in four year institutions at rates similar to the past. Clearly the system is expecting that many of these students will be accommodated in community colleges. My guess is that similar presumptions are being made in other states that are anticipating substantial growth in high school graduates. So I have some questions to pose:

- Do we know whether our community colleges have enough classroom, laboratory, student life, and parking facilities to accommodate these students?
- Do we have any idea whether we will be able to find enough faculty in English, mathematics, remedial instruction, and general education to instruct these students? Have we considered the impact of faculty retirements and the fact that public schools need a million more teachers than are being currently prepared when we think about our faculty for the future?
- Have we considered the nature of student support needs that these students are likely to bring compared to the adult student that we have concentrated so much energy and thought on in our recent past?
- Have we reviewed the national data and our local trends which are likely to suggest that these students will be highly diverse and many will need English language education?
- Have we thought about the impact their presence will have on our reading, writing, math and language centers and tutorial support needs?

Probably one of the reasons why I was invited to speak here today is because I have been talking to some of the younger students across our State in the course of my involvement in a leadership role in our State's K-16 initiative. I have become substantially more attuned to their needs as a result.

Let me set forward a fundamental premise for this aspect of my presentation. One of the keys to being better able to serve this growing high school population in the many parts of the country that will experience it is to create real, substantial, dynamic partnerships with our school systems. Why is that important? Fifteen years ago, 30 percent of the high schools graduating classes aspired to college. Today that number is in the 70-80 percent range. Virtually everybody is recognizing the need for at least some

college. This means that kindergarten to one or two years of college is the much more typical educational experience than K-12.

One thing that will make it more possible for us to serve the growing population that needs us is to improve the educational preparation of those entering our doors. If the students come better prepared and as a result need less time in our institutions to complete their degree that will take some of the enrollment pressure off. But, you say, the preparation of the students coming out of high school is the public schools' problem, not ours. Ideally that might be true, but quite frankly, if we don't involve ourselves in this complex social issue we are sticking our heads in the sand. Think of the challenge that the schools are facing. Preparing 30 percent of the academically most talented for college 15 years ago probably wasn't easy, but it was doable. Making 80 percent of your graduates college-ready at high school graduation is a daunting challenge. We need to lend our expertise and our energy to achieving the best possible outcome.

Recently I had the privilege of chairing the Remedial Education subcommittee of the Maryland K-16 work group. I was asked to bring together public school and college educators across the State with the objective of identifying some possible ways that we could work together to improve the educational preparation of students. I took this job with significant trepidation because remedial education is a topic that is emotionally charged, particularly in school systems where teachers and administrators feel they are being charged with preparing students inadequately. School and college counterparts on the committee eventually overcame our distrust and accomplished some important things.

One of the things that we decided to do was to conduct focus groups with students enrolled in remedial classes in some two and four- year colleges across the State.

What students told us:

- They did not take high school seriously.
- Their major reason for going to school was to socialize.
- They took an "I don't care" attitude beginning in tenth grade.
- They purposefully avoided challenging courses.
- They were not motivated.
- They did not think they would attend college.

- Their placement in remedial courses was deserved.
- They want to help others avoid their mistakes.
- Teachers spend too much time on discipline.
- They wanted a vocabulary course.
- They were never told what they needed in course work to be prepared for college.
- Half said they did not write one paper in junior or senior years.
- Teachers had low expectations.

We were, quite frankly, astonished by how much responsibility students placed on themselves for their lack of readiness for college work.

As a result of our deliberations, our review of national, and local research and our student interviews, we recommended the following:

- Undertake research to define course paths that assure college readiness.
- Implement testing tenth grade students using high school versions of college assessment tests.
- Undertake team taught intervention for those who are behind in math, English and reading skills.
- Launch college faculty to high school faculty articulation in math, English and ESOL.
- Test twelfth graders early so that they can be extensively counseled and advised.
- Develop college to high school student mentoring programs, permitting college students to emphasize the importance of serious commitment to academic performance at the high school level.

Some other things that need to be carefully pondered by us as we look toward national growth in traditional age students:

- It is likely that we will get more of the best and the brightest students in community colleges. What kinds of special programs can we create to meet their needs?

- We are likely to get a whole lot more of the academically average students. How often do we think about these students and their needs?
- What role can distance learning play in addressing this growth and how can we be realistic in our expectations of distance education?
- What impact will it have on adult enrollment if some younger students tend to be more disruptive students in classes and less committed to studies? How can we make sure that our environment stays a comfortable and welcoming one for adults as the average age in our institutions falls instead of rises as we had become so used to?
- How do our student services operations stack up to the needs of this population? What enhancements do we need to make in counseling, advising, student activities, admissions, registration, etc.?
- Is there adequate transfer capacity for our students who desire bachelor's degrees or will they face another substantial hurdle as they attempt to complete their educational objectives?

In many community colleges in many states the question of the last decade has been, "Will we get enough students to make our budgets"? I would suggest to you that the question of the future will be, "Do we have, can we create, can we obtain adequate facilities and resources to serve the students who need us? Will we effectively be closing the open door as our classes fill up and we can't find rooms or teachers to meet their needs"?

In my County we are, in effect, working to create a whole new upper division campus of the University of Maryland to prepare for the onslaught. I'm not sure yet, because we have a lot of analyzing still to be done of whether this will be an adequate response or whether we will need to do more. We need to undertake careful planning and analysis and we don't have much time.

To summarize, then I have some recommendations for us as we go forward:

- Undertake a planned approach to prepare for this population.
- Review State higher education capacities.

- Begin thinking of schools and community colleges as substantially interrelated systems and create real K-16 approaches.
- Carefully analyze faculty hiring needs.
- Undertake comprehensive student support services review.
- Embark on carefully detailed facilities planning.

So, I have focused this morning on a topic that will have more impact on some of us than others. But many, many of us are likely to experience growth in traditional college students. Whether or not that occurs in your area, school/college partnerships in an era where about 80 percent of students aspire to college are of rising importance. But if you happen to be in a district where substantial growth is expected, these partnerships are absolutely critical.

We hear a lot of gloomy speculation lately about how our competitors are going to put community colleges out of business. My message is a different and more optimistic one. There will be many students needing our services. It would be a national tragedy to have a population that needs community college education that we are unprepared to serve effectively. This is as important a worry to me as the worry about our competitors beating us at our own game. So, I close with reiteration of my opening question -- Are we ready? Cause ready or not – here they come.